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ABSTRACT

This performance guide is designed for teachers to use with students before and after a performance of "Sundiata: Lion King of Mali," adapted by Kim Hines and featuring Griot Alhaji Papa Susso. The guide, called a "Cuesheet," contains seven activity sheets for use in class, addressing: (1) Sundiata: Man & Myth (discusses the real man and the 700-year-old epic legend behind this story, Sundiata's historical kingdom, and notes about the storyteller); (2) The Story and Characters (offering an outline with pictures of the story and characters); (3) Listening to Lines (presenting some lines from the play and examining how they help develop the story and give the audience information about the characters); (4) Theatre Collaborators (discussing the many people who work together to make a theatre performance happen); and (5) Collaborating on the Performance (explaining the important role of the audience in a live theatre event). Resources for further exploration are listed. (SR)

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"Sundiata, Lion King of Mali": Adapted by Kim Hines.
Cue Sheet for Students.

by Aakhu TuahNera Freeman

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SUNDIATA

LION KING OF MALI

adapted by

[redacted]

featuring
Griot Alhaji Papa Susso

The Kennedy Center

CUE SHEET

Welcome to *Cuesheet*, a performance guide published by the Education Department of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, D.C. This *Cuesheet* is designed for use before and after attending a performance of *Sundiata: Lion King of Mali*.

THIS CUESHEET CONTAINS:

Sundiata: Man & Myth, pages 2 – 3

The Story and Characters, pages 4 – 5

Listening to Lines, page 6

Theater Collaborators, page 7

Collaborating on the Performance, page 8

Resources, page 8

2 SUNDIATA: MAN AND MYTH

The story of Sundiata [soon-dee-AH-tah] is both fact and fiction. Sundiata was a real man with real accomplishments, but he is also the subject of a 700 year-old **epic legend**—filled with magic, witchcraft, and fantastic deeds.

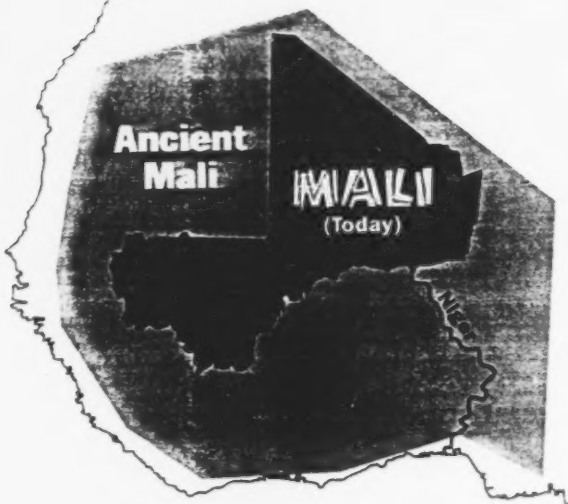
The twelfth son of the first king of Mali [MAH-lee], Sundiata was small in stature and had multiple disabilities. People shunned and ridiculed the young prince even though a prediction said that a baby with severe disabilities would grow up and defeat an evil ruler of Mali. Through patience, perseverance, wisdom, and strength, Sundiata overcame his disabilities, fulfilled the prophecy, and restored peace to his kingdom.

PHOTO BY CHESTER HIGGINS.

epic - a long poem, told in dignified language, celebrating the actions of a hero

legend - a story (especially one believed to be historical) handed down from earlier times.

Alhaji Papa Susso who blends African storytelling, music, and traditional performance techniques in *Sundiata: Lion King of Mali.*



SUNDIATA'S KINGDOM

The ancient Mali Empire existed as early as 1000 AD, but it began its rise to greatness and power under the rule of Sundiata. The Kingdom of Ghana [GAH-nah] had declined during the mid-11th century. In 1235, Sundiata defeated the nearby kingdom of Sosso which was led by the tyrant, Sumanguru. Following Sumanguru's defeat, all the leaders of smaller nations united under Sundiata who then founded the vast Mali Empire. It stretched west to the Atlantic Ocean, south into the forest, east beyond the Niger [NIE-jer] River, and north to the Sahara Desert.

The Mali Empire had fields of gold and the fertile flood plains of the Niger River. Mali was the second and largest of the three great successive African empires: the kingdoms of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai [SAWNG-hi]. Sundiata controlled the entire region's trade of goods, books, and gold.

ABOUT THE STORYTELLER:

Alhaji Papa Susso is a master **kora** player, traditional musician, and oral historian. He directs his own cultural organization, the Manding Music and Dance Limited, and also performs with symphony orchestras around the world. He is a premier performer in the orchestral piece, "African Portraits" by Hannibal Lokumbe.

Kora - a 21-stringed harp-lute invented by the "Susso" family of the Mandinka tribe and meant to be played by the professional musicians, singers, and griots attached to the royal courts

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C4E STUDENT THE STORY AND CHARACTERS

This story map will familiarize you with events and major characters in the play. As you read it, consider what Sundiata's story says about beauty, patience, perseverance, and teamwork.

1

The **griot** [GREE-oh] plays music and gathers the children around him to hear the story of **Sundiata,** a good and wise king, who overcame many challenges to become a great leader.

4

One of the king's other wives, **Sassouma Berete,** is jealous of the new wife. Because she wants her own son to be king, she spreads rumors about Sogolon.

The griot goes back in time and talks to the father of Sundiata. It is foretold that the king will take a new wife—a woman possessing the strong and courageous spirit of the buffalo—who will bear a son who carries the spirit of the lion and buffalo.

2

3

Many years go by. One day a woman named **Sogolon Kedjou,** who has disabilities, is brought before the king. Reminded by the griot that beauty is on the inside, the king marries Sogolon.

Griot - Historian. An African man who knows by heart the history of a village as it was passed down from his fathers and grandfathers. In this play, the griot also serves as counselor to the king.

5

After one year, Sogolon has a baby boy blessed by the spirit of the buffalo and lion. He is named Sundiata. As time goes by, it becomes clear that Sundiata can neither walk nor talk. People either shun him or laugh at him.

6

The griot reminds the king that from tiny seeds great trees grow, and tells him that Sundiata will grow in his own time.

8

No one pays any attention to the king's final act of declaring Sundiata king. Sassouma Berete and her son rule the land. Sundiata continues to grow healthier while Sassouma Berete keeps putting obstacles in his path to the throne.

7

One day the king falls ill. Before he dies, he tells Sundiata that he is destined to be king. On that day Sundiata begins to overcome his disabilities.

9

Sundiata and his mother are forced to flee from Mali. For years they travel from kingdom to kingdom. When Sundiata's mother becomes ill, they stay with **King Mema** who treats Sundiata as his own son. His teachings help Sundiata to grow strong and wise, preparing him for his role in defeating evil, uniting smaller nations under one rule, and leading Mali to greatness.

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LISTENING TO LINES

A playwright writes lines (dialogue) for actors playing characters to speak. The lines help develop the story and give the audience information about the characters. Lines also reveal how characters grow and change. This page will familiarize you with some of the lines in *Sundiata: Lion King of Mali.*

"You will hear the story of Sundiata, the Lion King...who overcame many things to walk with greatness. **– The Griot**

"You are elders and it is for us to care for you as you have cared for others." **– Sundiata**

"Our magic is powerful, but not powerful enough to hurt a heart full of kindness." **– Witch 1**

"I now return as your king. Henceforth, none shall interfere with another's destiny." **– Sundiata**

"How small the seed from which a great tree springs." **– The Griot**

"The ugly looking prickly pear repels us with its spines...but we forget what this fruit looks like on the outside once we have grown to know of its beauty and sweetness on the inside." **– The Griot**

Discuss the information that these lines reveal about plot and characters.

Think of different ways characters might say each line, e.g. loudly, excitedly, lovingly, etc. Choose one line from the list and express it in as many different ways as you can. During the performance, listen for how the actors in the play say these lines.

"Sometimes wisdom is bitter to the taste...but once it is in the stomach... it is ever so sweet." **– The Griot**

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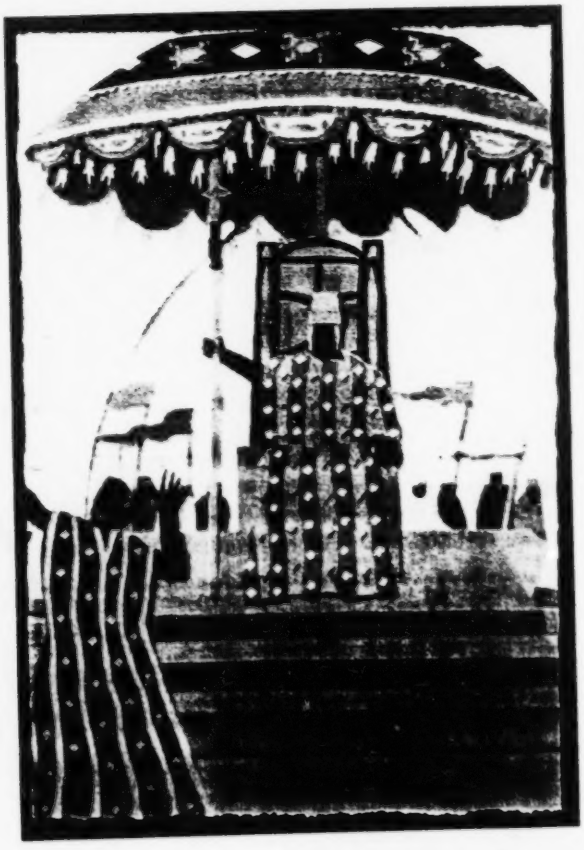
THEATER COLLABORATORS 7

When people see a performance, they often think only of the performers on stage. But there are many other people who come together to make the performance happen. The following list will familiarize you with some of them:



The playwright writes the play.

The director helps the performers understand their roles and tells them where to move on the stage. The director also works with the lighting, set, and costume designers to coordinate the look of the performance.

The set designer imagines and designs the scenery.

The costume designer imagines and designs the clothing that performers wear on stage.

The lighting designer decides what kinds of light (bright? dark? what colors?) will help show the place and the mood of each part of the story.

Stagehands make the scenery and lighting work.

The stage manager helps the performers and the stagehands do their jobs on time and in the right way (e.g., moving props and scenery on or off stage, turning lights up or down, on or off, making sure actors remember lines and movements).

After the Performance Activities

Write a review of the play. Describe and critique the play. Do you recommend that others attend a performance of this play? Why or why not?

Have you seen Disney's *The Lion King*? If so, compare *Sundiata: Lion King of Mali* to *The Lion King*. What are the similarities and differences? In the movie, why is Simba called "The Lion King"? Why is Sundiata called by the same name?

Describe the music in *Sundiata: Lion King of Mali*. In what ways did music help the telling of the story?

How did the scenery and lighting help you to understand the setting of the story?

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8 COLLABORATING ON THE PERFORMANCE

Theater is a collaborative art that requires the work of many people: playwright, director, designers, actors, and the final collaborator—you—the audience. The performance is not really a performance until an audience arrives. Prior to that, it is still a rehearsal. Your important role as the audience includes watching and listening carefully throughout the performance. A play takes longer to unfold than a television program, so your attention is important. Also, unlike television performers, the actors are in the room with you. Unexpected noise affects their ability to play their roles, and interferes with other audience members' enjoyment of the performance. Please feel free to laugh when something is funny, cry when something is sad, or even gasp when something fantastic occurs. And, of course, you can also applaud to show your appreciation.

SOME DIFFERENCES BETWEEN...	MOVIES	TV	PLAYS
Story is told by performers playing characters.	X	X	X
Performers are in the same room as audience.			X
Performers are aware of the audience.			X
Audience response affects performers.			X

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SUNDIATA: LION KING OF MALI

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